

And in addition, the bill adds a large number of new programmatic activities to the subsidy realm. We already subsidize a lot of farm products around here in a questionable way. Sugar is a good example of that. We basically subsidize sugar so that the price of sugar is about 75% higher than it is on the world market. That has an effect not only on

the cost of sugar but it also has an effect on things like the production of ethanol because ethanol can be produced from sugar cane.

In addition, it subsidizes all sorts of different commodities. As we know, the farm program is the classic example of what you learned in school – it's called logrolling. Where if you vote for my subsidy, I'll vote for your subsidy. Down the road we you vote for wheat, I'll vote for corn. Corn will vote for soybeans and soybeans will vote for cotton.

None of these will stand on their own. When they get in these sequential support efforts, they build a lot of support for a lot of programs that are of questionable need and certainly of questionable value when you look at a market economy, which we are supposedly a market economy.

Of course in the farm area we're not a market economy. We're a throwback to a commissar economy. They added a number of new programs in this bill. They added an asparagus payment, they added a chick pea payment, they added a camelina payment. They created a new program to look at the stress that farmers are under.

So they add a panoply of new programmatic activity in this bill, most of which is of questionable value but it has some interest group that promoted it and therefore it gets put in the bill.

So what I've done is line up five amendments here which I think are fairly reasonable and address a number of issues, policy-wise, big issues and some of them address fairly narrow and concise issues.

The first amendment which I have offered, which has been offered on my behalf by Senator Thune, but which I will call up and ask for a vote on as soon as we can get to it, as soon as we get people to give us votes around here, is the mortgage forgiveness amendment.

What we're seeing in America today, whether in rural America or urban America, is obviously a huge meltdown in the sub-prime lending markets. The effect of that meltdown is that many people are finding their mortgages foreclosed on, which is obviously an extremely traumatic event. To have your house taken or if your mortgage is in foreclosure, I can't think of too many more traumatic physical events of that magnitude. Obviously there are more traumatic health events, but not physical events or economic events.

Well, when you get foreclosed on, a second, really totally incomprehensible event occurs. The IRS assesses you a tax on the amount of the money which you owed to the bank or to the lender which you couldn't repay and which was wiped out in the foreclosure, so if you, for example, have an obligation to a bank of \$150,000 and your home is foreclosed on and it's sold for something that recovers \$100,000 of that, then that \$50,000

difference becomes personal income to you and the IRS sends you a tax bill for it, even though you just got foreclosed on.

Well, can you think of anything worse than that? I can't -- a person loses their home and then the IRS collection agents come by and say, 'well, you owe us "x" number of dollars because your home was foreclosed on.'

Well, this amendment would put an end to that. It would say that that would not be deemed income to the taxpayers so that a taxpayer whose home is foreclosed on does not receive the double whammy of having a tax bill sent to them.

It seems pretty reasonable to me. I can't imagine that anybody is going to oppose this amendment. I would hope that it would get a very large vote. It's not subject to a point of order because the cost of it is within what's left on the Pay-Go scorecard, to the extent there's anything on the Pay-Go scorecard, having been shredded.

But Senator Conrad last week said there was \$677 million on the Pay-Go card, which my staff confirms, as Ranking Member of the Budget Committee, and this amendment costs less than that. So it is in order and I hope that it will be supported and I think that it's only the fair and right thing to.

I mean, this is a quirk of tax policy which unfortunately if you're caught in it as a citizen of America, it is not a quirk. It is a devastation. And it is not right. Nobody, when their home is foreclosed on, should suddenly get a tax bill for the money that the bank didn't recover when it sold the home.

The second amendment I'm going to call up, and hope I can call up very soon and get a vote on it -- well, it is already pending -- is what I call the baby doctors for farms amendment.

There is a crisis in the rural areas. If you are a woman of child-bearing age, you are going to have a lot of trouble finding an OB-GYN. Why is that? Because baby doctors are being sued out of existence in rural America. As a result of the lawyers it is virtually impossible, it is extremely difficult, for OB-GYNs to practice in rural communities, whether farm communities or rural communities in this country.

Why is that? Because the base of practice, the number of people they can see or the number of babies they can deliver, never creates enough revenue to simply pay the cost of their malpractice insurance. And it's a crisis. If you're a woman in a farm community and you have to drive two, three, four hours to see a doctor when you're having a baby, that can be a serious problem, obviously.

It can just be a serious problem on the face of it, but it can especially be a serious problem in a place like New Hampshire where you're probably driving in a sleet or snow storm. You shouldn't have to go to distance. So we've suggested that simply in the area of

baby doctors in rural America that we put in place something to support the women in those communities and make sure that they have proper access to those doctors.

Essentially, we're following the Texas and the California proposals where we limit pain and suffering liability in a manner which allows these doctors to have affordable malpractice premiums.

It doesn't mean that somebody that's injured doesn't get recovery. They get significant recovery in the area of pain and suffering. What you don't get are these explosively large verdicts which essentially make it impossible for someone to pay the cost of the premium to support an obstetrics practice in a rural area.

And so this proposal, which is very reasonable, will serve a very large need in our country, which is to make sure that women get proper health care and especially during their child-bearing years in rural America. Again, I can't imagine this being opposed.

But actually, this is being opposed aggressively by the trial lawyer lobby. They are opposed to anything that limits their income in any way, even when something is as reasonable as saying in an area where we have a clearly underserved population, which is rural areas and doctors serving women in rural America, doctors who deliver babies, that they're going to stop any sort of reform that tries to make it possible to improve that situation.

Now, we know this reform works. Why? Because Texas has tried it. The language here mirrors Texas. Texas tried it and what Texas has seen during this period when they've put it into law is a huge influx, a huge influx of doctors into the state who deliver children, who are baby doctors.

So it has a track record. This isn't some sort of theoretical exercise here. We know in practice that this works and I know that if it were in place it would give a lot of women in this country the comfort of knowing that they were going to have a doctor that would care for them as they decide to have children.

So I hope that we can get to this amendment. But again I'm interested in the fact that this amendment is being stonewalled by the other side of the aisle.

They're telling me, 'well, we can't vote on this amendment.' Why? 'We can't vote on this amendment because we don't have our people here.' Well, no, there ought to be enough votes to take care of women in this country, so you wouldn't have to have extra people here to defeat the bill, the proposal which is fairly reasonable, which tracks a major state's decision and which has been proven to work when it comes to caring for women who want to have children. Very narrow again – it only applies in rural communities. It only applies to women who have babies.

Now, I have another amendment which I hope to call up, which I would like to have voted on fairly soon, by the way, I am agreeable to voting on all of these tonight. I am

agreeable to a half hour time frame. I am offering these amendments. They're pending. They're ready to go.

Another amendment I have says that this new program of creating a farmers' stress network should not be created. You know, how many more new programs can we create in this bill? This is an authorized program. It is not funded. But I expect it will be appropriated down the road.

But why do we need a stress program for farmers? Farmers are under stress, granted. I used to work on a farm. I understand that farming is a stressful activity, but, you know, running a shoe store during an economic downturn is a stressful activity, running a restaurant is a stressful activity. There are a lot of activities in America that involve stress.

Are we going to set up a stress network for every activity in America that has stress? And are we going to expect the federal government to fund it? My goodness, think of what we'd have to do for our wonderful staff here. We'd have to have an entire program, it would be incredible, because we give them a lot of stress.

You just can't keep throwing these programs out there because they make good press releases. There are 51 new programs in this bill. Let's at least pick one of them that is just so far off the ranch when it comes to being anything rational that the American taxpayers should have to pay for and say, 'no, we're not going to go this way.' That would be a nice gesture, a nice gift to the American taxpayer, to kill the stress network.

Then I have an amendment which says that the money in here for the asparagus program shouldn't be in here. I like asparagus. Now, I have been accused of not liking asparagus, that's why I'm bringing this forward. That's not true, I actually like asparagus. I've grown asparagus. After you get it cultivated, it takes about two or three years. As long as you don't roto-till it over, then that kills it. Which is what I did.

But as a practical matter, there is no reason why we should set up a new program for asparagus. I mean, really. This is going too far. A lot is going too far in this bill but this is just another example of going too far. So, granted it is only \$15 million, but again I'd like to think of it as a statement on behalf of the American taxpayer that we're not going to spend that money on a brand-new asparagus program.

There are some other programs we should throw out, the camelina program, the chick pea program. I picked out the ones that I think are most egregious and which we should make a little attempt to try to put some discipline into this bill. Fiscal discipline.

And then there's one that's fairly big, which is my last amendment. There's \$5 billion in this bill which is the ultimate earmark. It's \$5 billion, alleged to be an emergency fund for when emergencies strike farm communities.

Now, you have to understand how essentially this is a slush fund, it is a walking around fund, walking around money fund for about five states. And it's a purely and simply an earmark and a classic pork-barrel initiative.

We know that when we have an emergency in this country, we will fund it, especially if the emergency is in farm country. We do it every year, and I believe historically it's averaged about \$3.5 billion. I think that's the number; that's off the top of my head as a budgeter. I think that's the number we usually spent on emergencies in farm communities. If it's bigger than that, we spend more than that. If it's less than that, we spend less than that hopefully.

But when you put in place a program which exists before the emergency occurs, all you're saying is, here's a bunch of money, folks. Come and get it for every big wind storm that occurs in North Dakota, somebody's going to declare it an emergency and try to get reimbursed for their mailbox that got blown over.

Because the money is sitting there; it's that simple. It really is terrible policy to put this forward. You have absolutely set a floor, you know you're going to spend every year in this account and you know it's going to go to four or five states, because that's where the claims are made.

Much better is the approach we presently used, although not perfect, I admit to that. Much better is to identify when the emergency occurs, know what the costs were when the emergency occurs, and then pay those costs in order to reimburse the farm community which has been impacted, which is what we do, and we do it in a fairly prompt and efficient way around here whenever there is such an event.

There is one emergency, however, that's out there today, and that's the price of oil. The price of oil has jumped radically. And as a result, the cost of heating in this country has jumped radically. And people who are low-income in states from the northern tier especially, places like Minnesota and New Hampshire, people of low-income are in dire need of additional funds in order to meet their heating bills or else, literally, they're going to be in the cold. They're going to spend this winter as we head into February in serious straits. In New Hampshire, we've already seen a significant increase in the number of people applying for low-income energy assistance.

This doesn't go to wealthy people. This doesn't even go to middle-income people. It just marginally goes to low-income people. The low-income energy assistance really goes to people in the lowest of low incomes, people who really need that in order to make ends meet and keep their heat on in the winter.

And so what I'm suggesting is if we're going to declare emergencies around here and spend money, let's use the money on a real emergency, something that actually exists, where people are actually feeling the pain right now today in the area of paying for heating for low-income families.

And in addition, I've suggested that we reduce the deficit because that's a pretty big emergency in my humble opinion, getting this deficit down. So this amendment essentially says let's take \$1 billion and add to the low-income heating program and let's take the other \$4 billion and reduce the deficit with it. And that's pretty practical approach. That's addressing a need that exists today and a need that's going to exist tomorrow, which is to reduce the deficit. Rather than adding to the deficit and creating an emergency spending account which basically ends up being a slush fund and walking-around money for folks in four or five states who traditionally declare emergencies.

So those are the five amendments, and I regret that we can't get an agreement to vote all of them right now. I'd be willing to say, okay, let's debate all of them for a half an hour and then go to vote, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang.

I have serious reservations about this bill. I think it is very bad policy in a lot of areas. But I recognize that the votes are there to pass the bill, so I'm not trying to delay it in some tactical or procedural way. I'm suggesting just the opposite, that we proceed to vote on issues which are important, which include making sure that people whose homes are foreclosed on don't end up with a tax man showing up the next day and saying they owe money on the money they didn't ever see as a result of their home being foreclosed on.

Making sure that women who are having children can see a doctor in a rural community, farm families have adequate access to baby doctors. Making sure that people who are very low income have enough to be able to meet the heating costs of this winter, which we know are going to be 30% to 40% higher than they were last winter. Making sure that we reduce the deficit.

Suggesting that we eliminate a couple of programs which aren't that big but which are sort of examples of an underlying problem, which is that there is a lot of new programmatic activity in here that probably shouldn't be in here and there's a lot of subsidies in here that shouldn't be in here.

Thank you, Madam President. At this point I yield the floor.